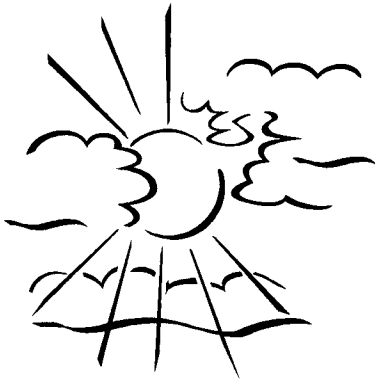


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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, May 18, 2006

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Poor, pregnant, unemployed ...

2nd chance for Ricky's mom?

Welfare workers to decide if she can keep baby

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

HARRISON -- On the paneled wall of her tiny northern Michigan motel room, Casey Jo Caswell has a place reserved for a picture of the baby she expects in August.

The photo will hang next to those of four children that Caswell, 25, lost to the state, including Ricky Holland, whose adoptive parents will stand trial this fall in the 7-year-old's highly publicized murder.

Caswell, who lives at the Wagon Wheel Motel in Harrison with her husband, Matt Caswell, 29, yearns for another chance to be a mother.

This most recent pregnancy presents challenges for Caswell -- who is poor, unemployed and now married to a registered sex offender -- and a conundrum for child welfare workers who must recommend to a judge whether she will keep her fifth child. The state says the child's welfare is the top concern.

Caswell's case already has attracted national attention from organizations that believe Michigan should invest more money and effort in keeping children with their birth parents and be in less of a hurry to seize them for adoption.

Michigan is among the toughest states for poor mothers who want to keep their children, said Richard Wexler, executive director of the Washington D.C.-based National Coalition for Child Protection.

"Michigan takes great pride in tracking mothers who have had parental rights taken from them and swooping down on them. They love to say 'Gotcha!' " Wexler said. "It's part of the whole take-the-child and run philosophy they have in Michigan."

Casey and Matt Caswell receive government benefits because Casey is pregnant: Medicaid for Casey and her baby, \$331 per month in cash assistance and \$187 monthly in food stamps plus coupons from the federal Women, Infants and Children program for cheese, peanut butter, juice, eggs and cereal. Formula will be added when the baby girl, whom they'll call Alexis Jordan, is born.

The two believe they can adequately care for their baby at the Wagon Wheel, where they pay \$350 in monthly rent. They have a tiny refrigerator and a microwave. And Matt recently got a 21-hour-per-week minimum-wage job at a fast-food restaurant.

Questions remain about whether the state will let them keep baby Alexis. The Caswells say the state case worker who signed them up for their current benefits has reassured them that they will get the help they need to take care of their newborn. But no worker has visited their home, or checked to see if they have what they need to take care of the baby.

"We asked (our worker), and she said we have nothing to worry about, basically," Matt Caswell said. He and Casey told their case worker about Casey's previous children, including what happened to Ricky, and that Matt is a registered child molester.

"Harrison is a small town and they try to give people second chances here," he said.

Yet the couple could be blindsided by what happens when the baby arrives. According to James Nye, director of field operations for the state Department of Human Services, the worker who signed them up for benefits won't decide if they can keep the baby.

The Department of Human Services is required, by law, to automatically file a petition with the court for termination of parental rights whenever a baby is born to a mother who has previously had her parental rights severed, Nye said.

"The same worker who handles the cash assistance, the Medicaid and the food stamps, is not a Child Services worker," Nye said.

Despite filing a petition to terminate parental rights, the Child Services worker could recommend that the judge keep the family together, he added.

"Just because we file a petition doesn't mean we can't produce for the court other information," Nye said. "It's a new assessment, it's not just 'Oh, my gosh, you lost a child 10 years ago, you automatically lose any other children you have.' "

State got Ricky at age 3

It certainly appeared automatic to Casey, when the state took her second, third and fourth babies.

She was just 16, with a ninth-grade education, when she gave birth to Ricky, her first child, on Sept. 8, 1997. Her husband, Ricky Baxter Gann, was her dad's best friend and more than twice her age.

Casey became homeless when Gann went to prison for drug trafficking. When Ricky was 3, Casey turned to the state for help. She agreed to place Ricky in foster care until she could get on her feet, but the state wouldn't give him back because his mother couldn't find a decent job or place to live.

Casey was pregnant with her second child, Trevor, when her parental rights to Ricky were terminated. "Before they even took Ricky, I was wanting another baby," said Casey, who gave birth to Trevor on Dec. 30, 2001.

A state worker went to see Casey after she brought Trevor home from the hospital.

"I had plenty of formula and a big box of diapers," Casey said. "She told me I had to get a bed ... but the only thing I could afford was a playpen. I only had \$200.

"She came back two or three days later to make sure I had (the crib)," Casey said. "She had brought a police officer with her; that way she would have no trouble with taking him."

When Sarah was born just 11 months later, Casey had left the state to escape child welfare workers. Casey returned to Michigan when the baby was three months old. One day, Casey thought the baby was sick and took her to the hospital. Her state caseworker found out and took Sarah.

"With (fourth child) Brett, they came and talked to me about taking him the night he was born," Casey said.

Tim and Lisa Holland, who already had Ricky, Trevor and Sarah, "came and picked him up the next day." The couple changed the names Casey had given her babies, although they continued to use "Ricky" as her oldest child's nickname.

The Hollands, of Williamston, are accused of murdering Ricky, and dumping his body.

It's 'case-by-case' basis

Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, said Child Services workers have discretion in deciding what parents must provide to keep their babies.

"For physical neglect, what we evaluate is whether a child has the food, shelter and clothing necessary to sustain the life health and well-being of the child, and we evaluate that on a case-by-case basis," Sorbet said.

In addition to food and shelter, the Caswells must deal with Matt's criminal record. In 2003, he was charged with second-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a 3-year-old.

He says he was framed by an ex-girlfriend, but pleaded no contest, to avoid the risk of being found guilty and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. He served six months in jail.

"I wouldn't have taken the plea if (the attorney) hadn't kept pushing, because I knew I was innocent," Matt said.

Casey believes him.

If state officials decide Casey must choose between raising Alexis alone or not at all, she's not sure what her choice will be.

"I don't know, 'cause Matt's my life," Casey said. Said her husband: "I went through all the counseling I was supposed to. I'm rehabilitated. They need to leave it alone. I've got a job, I've got a place to live and the baby's got plenty of people to care for it.

"They need to give us a chance."

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Missing girl returned to mother unharmed

By Jackie Harrison-Martin, The News-Herald

PUBLISHED: May 17, 2006

MONROE — After an Amber Alert was broadcast on area network television stations Saturday, a 5-year-old girl was returned to her mother in Rockwood.

Devin Sierra Powell was dropped off at a gas station in Carleton by her father, Jimmy Powell, after he made arrangements for his mother to pick the girl up and return her home, according to police.

Jodie Breeding, the girl's mother, reportedly has full custody of Devin. Police said she approved Powell's visit with Devin and arrangements were made for her to pick the little girl up at about 3:30 p.m. Saturday. She had been with Powell for about three days.

When 5 p.m. came and the two were still missing, Breeding called police. Powell's girlfriend told officers he borrowed her silver, 1998 Pontiac Bonneville to take Devin to McDonald's.

Powell was scheduled to be at work at 5 p.m. at Automotive Holdings in Monroe, but he never reported for work or called to say he would not be in that day, police said.

According to Monroe police Lt. Barclay Stewart, the Amber Alert was issued at about 7 p.m.

It was about 1:30 a.m. Sunday when the child's grandmother returned Devin to her mother.

"The child did not appear to be injured," Stewart said. "The child said she was with (her father) the whole time. The only statement we have is that he drove around all day with the daughter."

Stewart said Monday that officers have not interviewed Powell yet. He said it is unknown if he will face charges, and that it largely depends on whether the girl was neglected or endangered in any way and what the custody agreement says.

Details of the incident will be forwarded to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, where the decision on charges will be made.

Stewart said the prosecutor's office will have to determine if the child was gone long enough or if the incident is serious enough to warrant charges.

Detroit Free Press

May 18, 2006

CLINTON TOWNSHIP: Mom accused of drunken driving with kids in car

A Macomb Township woman faces multiple charges after she was arrested Saturday on suspicion of drunken driving with her three children in the vehicle.

According to Clinton Township police, Misty Hawkins, 30, was spotted about 12:30 a.m. driving erratically near the intersection of Groesbeck and North Road.

Police said Hawkins had a blood-alcohol content of 0.31%. She was driving a 1998 Oldsmobile Aurora; in it were her kids, ages 13, 10 and 4.

Hawkins was arraigned Monday in 41B District Court in Clinton Township on charges of operating while intoxicated and operating while intoxicated causing endangerment to children under 16.

She pleaded not guilty and is due back in court June 8.

Ex-deputy on tether after filming sex act

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, May 18, 2006

By Paul Janczewski
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A former special deputy for the Genesee County Sheriff's Department has been sentenced to probation and a tether for using his cellphone camera to capture a sexual episode between his friend's wife and a 13-year-old girl.

Genesee Circuit Judge Richard B. Yuille told John J.A. Debono he was "going to pay a tough price" for his decision to record the sexual encounter.

Debono, 22, of Swartz Creek, was placed on two years probation and sentenced to 60 days on tether after pleading guilty to possession of child sexually abusive material, a 4-year felony, and attempted accosting a child for immoral purposes, a 2-year felony.

He also must also register as a sex offender.

Mitchell H. Nelson, Debono's attorney, told Yuille his client has suffered the most by losing his position as a special deputy with the Sheriff's Department. He said the episode was fueled by alcohol and Debono's "loss of common sense."

After the incident came to light, Genesee County Sheriff Robert J. Pickell removed Debono from the reserve squad, which has no arrest powers but assists in traffic control and other duties during special events, such as parades.

Earlier, Yuille sentenced Deborah L. Workman, 17, and her estranged husband, Michael S. Workman, 22, both of Swartz Creek, to 60 days on tether, 2 years probation and registration as sex offenders.

Both entered guilty pleas of attempted accosting a child for immoral purposes.

The charges stem from an Aug. 11 incident in which the victim was videotaped on Debono's cellphone while nude and engaged in sex acts with Deborah Workman. Although the 13-year-old girl did not appear in court for any of the sentence hearings, her mother sent a letter saying the girl is still struggling with the psychological effects of the incident.

Variety show to aid kids

Grand Rapids Press

Thursday, May 18, 2006

ZEELAND -- ZEELAND -- For the past 18 years, Zeeland drama instructor Robert Torgerson has challenged the Zeeland High Players to give a performance for something other than applause. This year, students are planning a 7 p.m. Monday variety show in Lokers Auditorium of Cityside Middle School. It will include singing, dancing and comedy. Admission is \$5, with proceeds going to the Children's Advocacy Center in Holland, which provides services to children who have been sexually assaulted.

Criminal records

New list of school employees justifies initial outrage

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Thursday, May 18, 2006

The state's botched handling in February of a list of school employees with criminal records seems to have been largely corrected with a revised and greatly pared version. But the trauma caused by former inclusions of the wrong people will cast a shadow for a long time.

There is no plausible excuse for not carrying out a basic cross-checking of names in the first place, matching year of birth, gender and Social Security number if available, followed by personal contacts for verification if there was the shadow of a doubt.

That is what was done the second time around with the help of state police, after teachers unions and Gov. Jennifer Granholm raised Cain over the massive number of errors found on the list compiled earlier in the year. Fortunately, any damage from that early roster was minimized because it was kept from public disclosure by order of U.S. District Judge Paul V. Gadola.

The state's carelessness, so shocking at the time, is even more so now that the numbers of people unjustly included is known: The list of school employees with convictions has shrunk from about 1,500 in the original to a mere 476.

Some of those thousand or so taken out might have discreetly left their employment in the interim, knowing that they would have to go anyway. But surely many were inaccurately nailed, including several known within our area.

Despite poor handling of the initial work, the checking of more than 200,000 employees in the state's school districts remains a valid safeguard. The only ones bound to lose their jobs over it are those with sexual felony or misdemeanor convictions, and thus inappropriate for working around children anyway. Those people number only 11 on the list of 476 - including three teachers.

It's up to the state's school boards to decide the fate of the remaining 465, who are eligible to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Even though this is still a disruptive intervention, it will smooth out as all school employees are fingerprinted - a process that should be complete in 2008.

Then it will become a much simpler matter of checking and fingerprinting new employees as standard procedure before they are hired. The pity is that such a basic strategy for securing child safety got such a rough start, and so unnecessarily so.

DeVos talks about health care with physicians

By Kathy Barks Hoffman

May 17, 2006

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The best way to help the uninsured get health care coverage is to help them get a job, Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos told a physicians' group Wednesday. "It's still the most powerful social economic benefit that we can provide to individuals is to give them access to a job, and to a job that, if it doesn't give them access to health care, puts them on a track to where they will be able to have access, to a position that will have health care," he said.

He said he would look at the mandatory health insurance system Massachusetts is putting in place to make sure everyone had health care, but added he hadn't decided how best to cover the roughly 1 million Michigan residents who are uninsured.

He called the current Medicaid system unsustainable, and said he would try to root out fraud and abuse from the system as well as increase reimbursement rates for doctors and hospitals.

DeVos thanked the health care providers attending the Michigan State Medical Society's annual leadership summit for the free or reduced cost care they provide to many in their communities, and praised Michigan's health care system.

"The level of health care we have in Michigan is extraordinary," he said. "I'm grateful I've never gotten seriously ill elsewhere."

Foster-care students reach graduation milestone

Thursday, May 18, 2006

By Ted Roelofs
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Four years ago, William Widing fit the profile of so many students in foster care. He was confused, unfocused and flunking his classes at Caledonia High School.

But with a recent report card filled with A's and B's, Widing is on track to graduate May 25.

The feeling?

"It's awesome," said Widing, 19, who plans to attend Cornerstone University with the hope of becoming a youth minister.

While a high school diploma is no big deal to some, it can be a milestone to those for whom words such as "home" and "family" once meant abuse, neglect and inner turmoil.

"These kids have overcome a lot of those barriers to get to this point," said Randy Wright, a social worker for D.A. Blodgett for Children in Grand Rapids.

"A lot of these kids have come from families where generations did not go to college. Hopefully, a lot of these kids can break the cycle."

Wright is heartened by the track record of 19 potential graduates D.A. Blodgett has placed in foster care in West Michigan. Fifteen will graduate, and four have dropped out.

The graduates will be honored tonight at the Grand Rapids nonprofit facility, which, in years past, has seen as many as half of its potential graduates drop out of high school.

That mirrors national studies that find foster-care children suffer from higher high school dropout rates, fail to complete college, often are unemployed and are more likely to be homeless.

The statistics stem from many factors. Children removed from their homes for abuse and neglect often suffer emotional scars that harm their ability to trust adults. That makes it harder to form good relationships with teachers.

They are more likely to change school districts, have more medical problems and suffer disabilities that affect their ability to learn.

Beyond that, Wright said, many come from low-income families in which one or both parents were unemployed.

"They've grown up in families where they haven't seen a work ethic or an aptitude for education," Wright said.

Caledonia High School senior Dwayne Rudy, 19, has been in foster care nearly 10 years, moving to West Michigan from the Lansing area about four years ago. In the past decade, Rudy said, he has lived in six or seven homes.

He earned C's and D's his first two years of high school. He boosted his marks to A's and B's.

"The first two years were really, really hard. It was getting to know a new surrounding," he said.

Today, Rudy is proud to join Widing in next week's high school commencement. After school, he plans to move to Wisconsin to live with his biological mother. He intends to enroll in a technical school to learn computer hardware repair.

Rudy agrees the road of many foster-care children can be tough to navigate.

"But, in the end, it makes you stronger."

Widing recalled being ready to leave the chaos of his early family life, which he described as "a little intense."

"I was the one who wanted to go into foster care. I recognized that things going on in the home shouldn't be happening at all."

As a youth minister, he hopes to pass along some of what he has learned in the past few years.

Send e-mail to the author: troelofs@grpress.com

Dmitri Young Faces Domestic Violence Charges

Ex-Girlfriend Allegedly Assaulted At Birmingham Hotel

POSTED: 9:17 am EDT May 18, 2006

Detroit Tigers player Dmitri Young faces charges of domestic violence.

Young and his 21-year-old former girlfriend had dinner last month in Birmingham and drinks at the Blue Martini Lounge, police said. The couple then checked into the Townsend Hotel, where they argued, Local 4 reported.

Young is accused of grabbing the woman and choking her, according to police.

The Tigers player plans to turn himself in to police next week.

The couple had been dating for two years, Local 4 reported.

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Published May 18, 2006

Highfields gets OK to reopen youth residential program

State gives Onondaga facility 6-month provisional license

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

Highfields Inc.'s embattled youth residential program will reopen soon with a six-month provisional state license.

The state on Wednesday approved the facility's corrective action plan, which has been in development since allegations of abuse surfaced in February. Among changes put forth:

- More training and screening of staff.
- Increased staff-to-resident ratio.
- Mandated logging of all shift incidents by staff before they can leave for the day.

Key among the changes will be making sure that all staff understand that the program is not a boot camp where kids can be roughed up, said Keith Groty, chairman of the Highfields board of directors.

"We need to make sure they have the skills and competency to implement our new plan," he said. "We can't and don't want to risk this occurring again."

Groty said it's possible that not all of the 71 workers laid off in February will meet the center's new training and aptitude requirements.

Those who are allowed to return will be given a full week of training before the program reopens, which Groty said wouldn't be for at least a few weeks.

"We have some logistical things to do first," he said.

The residential program at the Onondaga-based home for juvenile offenders has been closed since Feb. 22, a few days after the state and Ingham County judges pulled 33 youths from it. Among the substantiated charges were that a Highfields worker shoved a boy's face into the snow after the 15-year-old refused to shovel a sidewalk; another counselor allowed some boys to haze a newcomer by pelting him with shaving cream cans, spoiled milk, shampoo and other personal care products while in the shower; and two other counselors marched an angry boy around outside in the cold without a coat or shoes.

The state earlier this month began proceedings to revoke the facility's license unless administrators developed a suitable corrective action plan addressing safety, communication and staff training.

Plan 'impressive'

Miriam Bullock, division director of the state Department of Human Services' Office of Children and Adult Licensing, said Wednesday that Highfields' corrective action plan was among the best efforts she's seen.

"It was quite impressive really, the seriousness with which they addressed the issues and the detail they put into it," Bullock said. "It obviously took a long time. They dissected the incidents and looked at what needed to be done."

Bullock said she also was pleased with the hiring this week of Larry Miesner, an adjunct criminal justice professor at Michigan State University and former chief of Michigan's Bureau of Juvenile Justice, on a four-month contract as interim president and chief executive officer.

"An organization's willingness to replace at the top is usually a sign that things can turn around," Bullock said.

Six-month window

The provisional license means that Highfields has a six-month window to show the state it has made

needed changes. If no more violations are found, the center will get a regular two-year license.

The state allows up to four, six-month provisional licenses, Bullock said.

Steve Swart, who has worked as a residential counselor at Highfields since 2003, said he's eager to get back to work.

"I really miss working with the kids," said Swart, 32.

"It's a shame what ended up happening - with it shutting down. There were some things some people did wrong, but overall a lot of good things were happening for the kids."

Still, Swart said, he welcomes any changes that can better the program.

"There's always room to improve," he said.

"This will just be an opportunity for us to do even better work."

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

MICHIGAN

Youth drug use down in study

State report says alcohol and tobacco use are also declining

May 18, 2006

BY LORI HIGGINS

FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Fewer teens are drinking, smoking and taking drugs, according to the results of the annual Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Study released Wednesday.

The survey of 3,253 students, from 53 public high schools, was conducted in spring 2005 by the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Department of Community Health.

Since 2001, the percentage of Michigan teens who said they had tried smoking has dropped from 64% to 52%; the percentage who recently used alcohol dropped from 46% to 38%, and the percentage who had sexual intercourse in the three months before the survey had dropped from 30% to 29%.

In a news release, the state agency attributes the declines to such things as the state's health curriculum that is used in more than 90% of school districts, school health centers and other programs that promote positive health in youth.

There were also declines in the percentage of teens who had smoked marijuana or ridden in a car with a driver under the influence of alcohol.

"I'm happy," said Nancy Eggenberger of Canton, who has three children, including two teenagers. "I have no idea why" the numbers are declining, she said. "But somebody's doing something right."

That message is coming from school and from home, said Eggenberger's daughter, Olivia Eggenberger.

"I took health and, of course, they said drugs are bad," said Olivia, 14 and a freshman at Plymouth High School in Canton.

And her mother routinely talks to her children about risky behaviors. "Those commercials come on, saying there's never a bad time to talk to your kids about smoking. She'll turn to us and say 'Hey guys, you shouldn't smoke.' We're like, 'Thanks Mom,' " Olivia Eggenberger said.

The messages may be annoying to the teens, but Olivia admitted they make a difference. The Michigan Department of Education released the results of the survey Wednesday afternoon in a news release that attributes the declines to such things as the state's health curriculum that is used in more than 90% of school districts, school health centers and other programs that promote positive health in youth.

WAYNE COUNTY

A FRANK PLEA FOR CASH: Wayne Co. group fixes holiday meals

May 18, 2006

BY NAOMI R. PATTON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Since 1988, the Senior Alliance has picked up where Meals on Wheels leaves off by delivering meals on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter to homebound residents in Wayne County.

Now the group wants to expand its holiday meals service and provide food on Memorial Day, July 4 and Labor Day.

To help reach that goal, a hot dog roast fund-raiser was held last Thursday at the William R. Copeland Recreation Center in Wyandotte. The amount raised was unavailable, but the alliance said it hoped to have enough to serve a meal Memorial Day, which is May 29.

"Seniors would welcome it with open arms," said Denise Champagne, who was one of the program's first volunteers, in 1988. "That's the whole reason you do it. ... It's not so much the meal, it's the contact you get."

It costs about \$10,000 annually to provide around 2,000 meals to 34 communities in western and Downriver Wayne County for the three covered holidays, said Lori Vail, Senior Alliance Holiday Meals coordinator. The Senior Alliance is part of the state's Area Agency on Aging branch that serves Wayne County.

Tom Talluto, former Wyandotte City Councilman, helped organized the fund-raiser. City Councilman Johnny Kolakowski, chef to rocker Ted Nugent and owner of Kola's Food Factory in Riverview, catered the roast. It cost \$15 to attend.

"It's not the \$15, it's where the money is going that got people here," Talluto said.

Holiday Meals fills an important need, said Carol Scott, Wayne County manager of Senior Services Nutrition, which includes Meals on Wheels. Meals on Wheels operates on the county's schedule, providing only frozen meals during holiday breaks, she said.

"Their program gives the same contact with someone and a hot meal," Scott said about the Senior Alliance. "The contact is very important."

To learn more about volunteering or to make a donation to the Senior Alliance Holiday Meals program, call 734-722-2830 or go to www.aaalc.org. Contact **NAOMI R.**

PATTON at 248-351-3689 or patton@freepress.com.

Thursday, May 18, 2006

More job losses loom

Analysts: 63,000 more factory jobs gone by '07

Louis Aguilar / The Detroit News

Michigan's jobless rate jumped to 7.2 percent in April, widening the divide between the nation's stable job market and the state's increasingly bleak employment picture.

And Michigan's job situation isn't expected to get any better in the near future. University of Michigan economists told state legislators in Lansing on Wednesday that the state likely will lose tens of thousands of jobs this year and next, mainly in manufacturing as the auto industry continues to struggle.

The average annual unemployment rate could end up at 6.7 percent this year and reach 7.1 percent in 2007, while the U.S. rate holds at 4.7 percent.

Bella Yanovsky of Lincoln Park knows just how tough the job market is in Michigan. Ten years ago, the 45-year-old mother of three was laid off from a \$15-an-hour job assembling car door parts at a small auto supplier that eventually closed. She hasn't earned as much since then.

"I've been a waitress, a cashier at Franks Nursery, a clerk at a florist -- been laid off from all of them," she said. "At this point, I'd be happy for a steady full-time work at minimum wage. It's scary as hell out there."

April's four-tenths of a percentage point gain puts Michigan's jobless rate 2.5 points above the U.S. rate, and marked the 56th consecutive month that Michigan surpassed the nation in unemployment

"Michigan is really looking into a disaster area," said Patrick Anderson, a Lansing-based economist and founder of the Anderson Economic Group. "That's a very serious gap between Michigan and the rest of the United States. Anything above 1.5 (percentage) points is dangerous."

Michigan's jobless rate climbed as the number of unemployed residents actively looking for work rose by 20,000 last month to nearly 370,000, the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth said Wednesday.

The rate increase may be a slight exaggeration because many factors in the monthly comparison can skew the results, said Dana Johnson, chief economist for Comerica Inc. The unemployment rate is compiled from a monthly telephone survey of 1,760 households and payroll surveys of 14,000 businesses statewide.

While the household survey showed a significant increase in the number of people looking for work, the payroll survey reported only 3,000 layoffs and the state saw an overall gain of 17,000 non-farm payroll jobs.

The job gains came in tourism-related work, with 8,000 new jobs, and in the professional and business services sector, with 3,000 jobs, which helped offset losses in manufacturing and government.

But the month-to-month pattern is clear. "Things here in Michigan are a lot weaker than the national economy," Johnson said. "The labor market is weak, job growth minimal."

The clearest trend is the steady, staggering loss of manufacturing jobs -- 21,000 since April 2005 -- that continues to drag the rest of the economy down.

The U-M economists noted that Michigan lost 15,200 manufacturing jobs in 2005. They predict Michigan will lose nearly 10 percent of its remaining factory jobs by the end of 2007 or a total of 62,700: 40,200 jobs losses in 2006 plus 22,500 more in 2007.

Overall, they expect Michigan to shed another 38,600 jobs during 2006 before the economy adds about 1,500 jobs during 2007. The small job increase projected for 2007 would snap a string of six straight years of job loss, the longest on record.

As more manufacturing jobs are lost, the ripple effect will be felt throughout Michigan's economy. Just ask Dan Kenna.

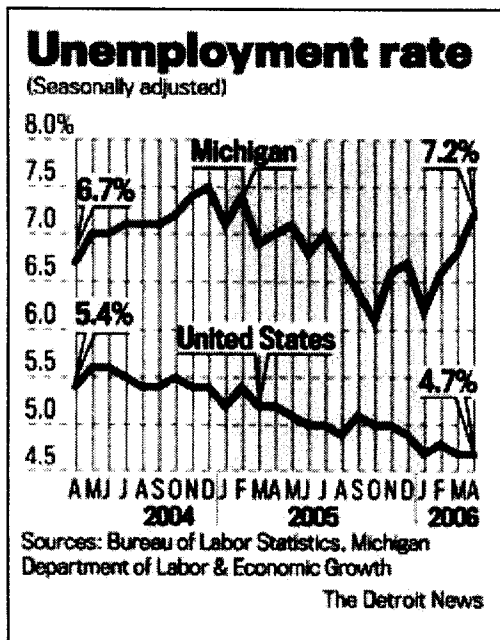
The 35-year-old was a short-order cook in a downtown Pontiac restaurant for six years beginning in the late 1990s, when 1,800 white-collar General Motors Corp. workers were relocated to office buildings near Saginaw Street.

But as GM's fortunes worsened, many of its workers were transferred or laid-off.

The restaurant where Kenna worked shut in '05. He gets by on part-time work.

"The downtown," he said, "looks kind of hurting again."

Detroit News Staff Writer Charlie Cain and the Associated Press contributed to this report. You can reach Louis Aguilar at (313) 222-2760 or laguilar@detnews.com.



Michigan's unemployment rate rises to 7.2 percent

May 17, 2006

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan's unemployment again topped 7 percent, rising four-tenths of a percentage point to 7.2 percent in April, officials said Wednesday.

It was the third straight increase since January, when the state logged its lowest unemployment in nearly four years in January with 6.2 percent. Last month, unemployment was 6.8 percent.

Michigan's seasonally adjusted jobless rate was well above the national average, which was 4.7 percent in April. It also was above the April 2005 rate of 6.9 percent.

Economists said Wednesday that the state shouldn't expect to recover any time soon.

Rick Waclawek, director of the state's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, said the rate has risen in part because more than 50,000 people have entered Michigan's job market looking for work since January.

"While there has been some job growth over this period, it has not been enough to offset the increase in those seeking jobs," he said in a statement.

But Patrick Anderson, of Anderson Economic Group in East Lansing, said work force numbers typically fluctuate. The more fundamental issue, he said, is that Michigan had 13,000 fewer nonfarm payroll jobs in April than it did a year earlier.

"Having an unemployment rate above 7 percent when the nation is at 4.7 percent is flirting with disaster," Anderson said, adding that if the national economy takes a slight downturn, Michigan could be plunged into a depression.

The number of payroll jobs in the state increased by 17,000 in April, to 4.39 million. Tourism was the brightest spot, with the state gaining 8,000 leisure and hospitality jobs from March to April. Business and professional services gained 3,000.

Manufacturing employment remained stable for the third month in a row, though in the past year it has fallen by 21,000 jobs.

At a revenue-estimating conference Wednesday, University of Michigan economists reiterated that the state would continue slowly losing jobs in 2006 and 2007.

They projected the unemployment rate isn't likely to get better in the short term primarily because of the auto industry's woes and uncertainties with companies such as Delphi Corp.

"We don't see sustained job recovery until 2008," University of Michigan economist Joan Crary said. The loss of auto jobs is "just too big a hurdle to overcome in the next couple of years," she said.

The projected job loss, while relatively small overall, is expected to continue to be felt the most in the manufacturing sector.

The University of Michigan projects the state could lose 26,000 manufacturing jobs this year and 25,000 next year. Most other job categories would gain employment, limiting the overall wage and salary job loss to about 9,700 in 2007, according to the forecast.

On the Net:

Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth: <http://www.michigan.gov/dleg>

83-year-old woman testifies she was raped

Kathy Reynolds
WZZM

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Holland-An 83-year-old Holland woman says she was raped. And today she took the stand to testify against her alleged attacker.

Police believe Kevin Spencer broke into the elderly woman's home at the end of April and sexually assaulted her 3 times.

Because of her age, she was asked to take the stand, so her testimony could be preserved in case of a future trial.

Kevin Spencer is 20 years old. The woman he's accused of raping is 83.

The alleged victim said, "I remember him standing there, a small figure and he had a navy sweatshirt on."

Prosecutor Craig Bunce asked, "What happened when he got on top of you? "

The alleged victim responded, "It was sex, and it was hard, he was hurting me."

Bunce asked, "Did you tell him anything while he was on top of you, hurting you?"

The alleged victim responded, "I just said you are hurting me terrible."

It was the evening of April 26th, sometime after 11:00 P.M. The woman does not remember the attacker leaving.

The alleged victim said, "My back doors were wide open and then I knew it wasn't a dream."

The woman called 911. Police arrested Kevin Spencer. Spencer also lives in Holland and worked at a demolition company as well as installing carpet. It is not clear how, or even if he knew the elderly woman.

When asked how she is doing now, the woman responded, " Like I say, I cried so much, I can't cry no more.

Spencer is charged with home invasion and three counts of criminal sexual conduct in the first degree. That carries a penalty of life in prison.

He has prior criminal records in both Allegan and Ottawa counties.

For a time, he was also wanted in Indiana, where he was accused of dealing meth near a school.

Web Editor: Stanton Tang, Executive Producer

Web Editor: John Bumgardner, Assignment Desk

Web Editor: Kathy Reynolds, Reporter

'I can't cry no more,' rape victim tells court

Thursday, May 18, 2006

By John Tunison
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- As her family sat nearby, an 83-year-old Holland woman testified how a rapist hit her in the mouth, then possibly choked her, during an assault last month.

"I cried so much, I can't cry no more," the woman said.

A judge Wednesday ordered Kevin Spencer, 20, to stand trial on sexual assault charges after hearing the victim's testimony.

Spencer allegedly admitted the rape to detectives after his arrest on a Silent Observer tip.

"He explained to us that he had been in an altercation at his house, left his residence, picked her house randomly, entered her house through the back door, which he stated that he just opened up and pushed it open," Holland police Detective Tom Kazen testified in a transcript of an arrest warrant. "At that time, he said he went to the victim's room, woke her up out of sleep early in the morning hours and proceeded to have sex with her, held her down."

Spencer, who wanted to waive the hearing, was not in the courtroom at the request of his attorney, Robert Hamilton. Prosecutors received permission from Holland District Judge Susan Jonas to question the victim to preserve her testimony for future reference.

The victim, who lives alone, was sleeping in her West 31st Street house on April 27, said she awoke to find a man wearing a hooded sweatshirt standing over her. She told him to leave, but he refused.

She testified he then raped her, hitting her in the mouth and bruising her lip during the assault and leaving marks on her cheeks where he held her down. She said she may have been choked, but was not sure where he placed his hands.

In a report used to determine bond, Spencer told a court worker he drank a fifth of vodka and took eight ecstasy pills before the assault. Court records show he was living less than two blocks away on South Washington Avenue.

During the assault, the victim said she repeatedly told the assailant to stop.

"I just said, 'You're hurting me terrible.' That's all I said," she testified.

The victim testified the assault left her confused. She remembered walking into her kitchen and seeing her back doors open about 12:50 a.m.

"I don't remember if I was out or in shock," she said. "I thought I was dreaming."

She called 911 after seeing the open doors, realizing she had been assaulted.

Spencer is charged with three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and home invasion. If convicted, he could face life in prison.

Ottawa County Assistant Prosecutor Craig Bunce said the victim, accompanied by several family members Wednesday, has been helpful throughout the ordeal.

"Through the entire process, she has shown great strength and resolve," he said.

Send e-mail to the author: jtunison@grpress.com

United Way spending

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Thursday, May 18, 2006

United Way of Jackson County has announced its annual allocations. Mixed in with sighs of relief and surprise, there were cries of disappointment. Fifty agencies had requested a total of \$2.8 million, and 33 had to be content to share less than \$1 million.

This year's allocations totaled \$939,233. They include a wide range of programs, such as: \$100,000 for family counseling (Family Service & Children's Aid), \$75,000 for teen pregnancy prevention, \$50,000 for child-care scholarships (Jackson Child Care Center), \$50,000 for emergency needs (Salvation Army), \$46,000 for early truancy intervention (Florence Crittenton Services), \$20,000 for after-school education (Lily Missions Center), and \$20,600 for respite care (Catholic Charities of Jackson).

Just from that sampling (and the list is long), one can see that United Way continues to invest donors' dollars in ways that are diverse and substantial.

There is, however, a notable shift in United Way's funding philosophy. In the past, the agency always had an administrative role. It gathered funds in an annual campaign and allocated them to agencies that provided the services. Increasingly, United Way is operating on both sides of the administrative/human services line. This year \$500,000 went to programs United Way itself initiated. For example, United Way operates the 211 human services hotline, a service that puts people in need in touch with agencies that can help them. Other initiatives include Success by Six, Health Care for All, Community Report Card, Community Warmth Initiative, Full Circle (juvenile justice), teen-pregnancy and divorce-prevention programs.

One may agree or disagree with specific allocations to this or that agency, or with the new direction of United Way, but what is beyond reproach is the fair and thorough process for reaching those decisions. Dozens of local citizens (volunteers) are involved in "vision councils" that discuss agencies, their requests, services and track records, and the community's emerging needs. Based on all that, allocations are made -- no longer to individual agencies, but to programs that address areas of community need.

This refinement helps to ensure that United Way's donors have an impact -- not just in funding agencies, but in meeting specific needs, as defined by the community itself.

GOP Picks A Few Fights With Supplemental

MIRS, Wednesday, May 17, 2006

Republican lawmakers moved ahead today with a mop-up spending plan for the current fiscal year, but not without taking a few pokes at Democrats and the administration in the process.

Under SB 0242, a supplemental spending bill that passed out of a House-Senate conference committee today, the Department of Corrections (DOC) would need to use the now-closed Michigan Youth Correctional Facility (MYCF) in Baldwin before opening up any other mothballed units or prisons if inmate counts spur and expansion is needed.

The Ann Arbor film festival would not receive \$13,600 from the state this year in retaliation for some questionable movies shown at last year's festival including the "Arousing Adventures of Sailor Boy" and "Boobie Girl" (See "Drolet: 'Stop Spending Taxpayer Dollars on Pornography,'" 3/17/06). This bothered Democrats who felt the deal was that the film festival would get their state money this year, but not next year.

A late addition to the budget was a \$500,000 request by the Secretary of State's office for the free identification cards they may be asked to issue as part of the Republicans' overall plan to require voters to show photo I.D. at the polls (See "Free Ids For Indigents Bill Moves," 5/3/06).

Also, the budget also took out \$500,000 a piece for Bay de Noc and Mid Michigan community colleges to help with problems both rural schools are having in collecting enough property tax money to keep the schools operating.

And the state would spend \$500,000 on a private company to evaluate how well the DOC is running its prisons.

The bill, SB 0242, could have been worse from a Democratic perspective, however.

House Republicans tried to make sure family planning and pregnancy prevention money that's spent by the Department of Community Health is used to discourage sexual activity outside of marriage. That didn't make the cut.

Neither did a House Republican provision that banned the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) from implementing storm water standards that are more stringent than the federal standards.

Amtrak is getting the \$1 million that had been taken off its \$7.1 million state subsidy during last fall's budget discussions. Last year, the Senate successfully added a catch to the Department of Transportation budget that banned the passenger train provider from receiving the full \$7.1 million unless they relocated their maintenance facilities in the state.

Outside of these items, the supplemental bill was significant in that it set aside \$350,000 to pay locals the property taxes the state owes on its Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land. As part of the budget-cutting process last year, the Legislature cut \$350,000 of this money (known as "payment in lieu of taxes" or PILT). With revenues coming in better than expected, the Senate agreed with a House recommendation to put the money back in.

The House wanted to put any leftover money from the current Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 budget into the Rainy Day fund as opposed to using it to balance the FY 2007 budget. If that happens, it will be a part of the FY 2007 target discussions.

Also, Wayne County Community College, which sacrificed \$550,000 of its own state appropriations for two budgets for the benefit of three rural community colleges, received half of that money back in this budget (\$225,000) with the pledge that the other half is coming in the FY 2007 budget (See "Education Budgets Signed With One Veto," 8/6/03).

Finally, the supplemental gives \$4 million to the Detroit Zoo without the caveat that the Detroit City Council give up its authority over the zoo. That provision caused the City of Detroit to not accept the state's bailout money earlier this year, a decision that nearly closed the zoo amidst a huge public outcry.

The provisions regarding MYCF and the prisons were significant in that in came after Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** cancelled the state's contract with MYCF, which, at the time, was the only private prison in the state system. Republicans fought the cancellation to the end, saying it would destroy poverty-ridden Lake County, but the administration said the former MYCF workers who wanted jobs within the state prison system were given those.

Other items in the supplemental include:

- \$1.6 million in combined job training grants for Kirtland and Montcalm community colleges to help the Greenville and Gaylord areas retrain workers after the closure of the Electrolux and Georgia-Pacific plants.

- The budget puts \$1 million of 21st Century Jobs Fund money for the Van Andel Research Institute in Grand Rapids and \$1 million for a Pfizer project in Ann Arbor. The House recommended \$1 million for Kalamazoo Valley Community College's special chemical library, but that didn't make the cut.

- Another \$5 million of 21st Century Jobs Fund money is being put into the Agricultural Development Fund. The addition puts agriculture-related spending of 21st Century Jobs fund at \$10 million. The new bill takes out a provision that had dedicated \$1 million of this money to cherry growers.

- Lawmakers are setting aside \$525,000 more this year for food safety testing and fruit and vegetable testing.
- A Barry County domestic violence program is getting \$25,000 in federal money after the House asked for \$75,000 and the Senate asked for \$30,000.
- The Department of Human Services (DHS) is required to conduct an indigent burial program in select counties.
- Also, out-of-state placement of foster children can only be made if no in-state facility is available. This replaces current law that says out-of-state placements can only be made if no in-state facility is within 100 miles of the child's home.
- Lawmakers gave the State Police \$500,000 for the new initiative that weeds out felons and sex offenders from their public school jobs.
- The Department of Treasury is being given \$100,000 to help it develop a new business tax model in case the Single Business Tax (SBT) is repealed.

Without a home

Lack of affordable housing is culprit

By SCOTT SWANSON, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — Compared to bigger cities, Marquette's homeless problem is hardly visible. But that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. And local officials are singling out the lack of affordable housing as a major culprit.

According to a 2005 local survey compiled by the Continuum of Care group of the Emergency Needs and Homeless Coalition, 14 families with children and 35 individuals in Marquette and Alger counties were considered homeless. Those numbers don't take into account the "transient" homeless — people who move from friend to friend or family member to family member and have no permanent address — according to Bonnie Peltó, executive director of the Marquette Housing Commission.

The inability to find affordable housing is a major factor accounting for homelessness in the Marquette area, Peltó said.

"A healthy community is a community with a diversity of people in it," she said. "Not just the high-end, where certainly there's been much more emphasis placed.

"I understand the city of Marquette's needs to increase the tax base to provide services and not make any more cuts. But I don't think it's a healthy community unless you have the diversity."

At the Janzen House in downtown Marquette, which provides temporary housing for the homeless, there are currently no vacancies, according to Director Dan Lancour. The facility can house up to 32 residents, and is full about 95 percent of the time, Lancour said.

The Janzen House takes in many people who, for various reasons, can't pass the screening processes at public housing facilities in the Marquette area, Lancour said.

"I deal with the people who fall through the cracks," he said. "They fall through the cracks because of felonies or whatever, and public housing won't take them."

Lancour added that he didn't always agree with the public housing policies.

"People could be a little more lenient," he said. "What happened to second and third chances?"

"At the same time, (public housing) is usually full, too. This is a tough question, and the community needs to get together and figure that out."

Pelto said that 38 percent of people who apply with the Marquette Housing Commission are rejected due to not meeting the income threshold or because of their background.

However, a non-profit arm of the housing commission, the Marquette Affordable Housing Program Inc., recently received a Community Housing Development Organization designation from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, she said.

The designation will allow the non-profit to apply for MSHDA “Home Funds,” Pelto said, which the program hopes to capture to create new affordable housing opportunities.

“We are hopeful, and they are encouraging us to apply,” Pelto said.

Marquette Mayor Tony Tollefson said city officials have been attempting to procure additional state and federal grants to assist in the creation of more affordable housing.

“Both the city manager and I have recently met with some developers who are interested in doing just that — providing more affordable housing within the Marquette area,” he said. “It’s something we’re always interested in.”

However, he added that development along the shore of Lake Superior should be preserved for higher-end housing that will help increase the city’s tax base. Several high-end condominium complexes have sprung up around the lakeshore in the past few years.

“While we want to be able to provide affordable housing, that doesn’t necessarily mean that it needs to be along the lake,” he said.

Teen left homeless by father's death to graduate from high school

May 18, 2006

ADRIAN, Mich. (AP) — After sitting at his father's bedside watching him die of cancer, Joe Flores had nothing left.

No home. No close family. No place to go. As a freshman in high school, he was on the streets with no one to care for him.

"You just don't know what you got till it's gone. You're nothing without your parents," Flores said.

Now 18 and a senior at Madison High School near Adrian, Flores is poised to graduate on May 28, overcoming considerable odds with help from an area family who took him in.

His principal, Connie Ries, said he could have gone either way.

"But he has taken the high road, made something of himself," Ries told The Daily Telegram. "I give him a tremendous amount of credit."

Until ninth grade, Flores was raised by his dad. His mother wasn't a part of his life.

"It was always just my dad and me," Flores said. "He was the glue that held our family together. My dad was my best friend. He taught me everything. He was the person I went to, and he was a big inspiration to me. I admired him better than any man."

After his father's death, Flores bounced from house to house, living sometimes with aunts, sometimes sleeping on a friend's couch. With little adult supervision, Flores got to school, kept his grades up and managed to play on three sports teams.

His cover story for school officials was that he was living with an aunt, but Ries said she suspected that wasn't the case.

He had a residence that was a legal residence," she said. "If Joe would have put a red flag up, if he had attendance problems, if he were failing, if there were issues" Ries said she would have done further investigation. "He never put any red flags up," she said.

Flores told The Associated Press that he got into drugs and alcohol, but he never stole anything. He relied on friends' families to give him lunch money and feed him. The drugs and alcohol didn't do anything to make him feel better, he said.

He never stayed in one place too long because he didn't want to intrude on his friends' families. At least until his junior year when a new student moved to the school district from Port Huron.

Flores said he introduced himself to Aaron Dumm, and the two quickly became friends. He told Dumm of his situation, and Dumm talked to his parents, Aaron and Karen Dumm.

"A couple of weeks later I was staying there," Flores said.

The Dumms got him through his junior and senior years. On Mother's Day, he rewarded Karen Dumm with a large wooden yard swing, purchased with the last Social Security check he received before he turned 18.

"Mr. and Mrs. Dumm, they took me in and they treated me like nothing less than family," Flores said. "I can never repay them. They are a great family. If every family were like the Dumm family, there would be no hatred in the world."

Now Flores has earned \$3,000 in scholarship money and plans to go on to college and become an electrician.

And after going through what he has, Flores said he's well prepared for life.

"I feel as though I can take anything on," he said

Thousands wait in line for scarce housing vouchers

Thursday, May 18, 2006

By Cedric Ricks
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Elaine Tomkinson spent Wednesday morning standing in a line hundreds deep just to be put on a waiting list.

She couldn't pass up the chance to be considered for federal housing assistance, even though that help may be several years away, if it comes at all.

"Affordable housing is extremely hard to find if your income is low or if you are on a fixed income," Tomkinson said as she stood in line outside Housing Resources Inc. headquarters on North Burdick Street in downtown Kalamazoo. "It's extremely hard to find something nice and reasonable."

Officials estimated at least 2,500 people visited four sites in Kalamazoo by the day's end Wednesday to apply for about 800 housing-choice vouchers, formerly known as Section 8 vouchers. The federal government will pay for a portion of the voucher holders' rent, with eligibility based on income.

The one-day sign-up was the first time in five years that officials from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority have accepted names for a voucher waiting list in Kalamazoo.

There were also long lines at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission on North Burdick, Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services' training center on East Stockbridge Avenue and Kalamazoo Community Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services' office on West Kalamazoo Avenue.

"Times are getting hard around here now," said Tony Bell, a 29-year-old Kalamazoo resident who waited at the training center.

"Jobs are scarce and bills are getting bad," said Bell, who is unemployed and raising two children. "You got to do what you can to survive. I'll take whatever help that's possible."

Kalamazoo County has an allotment of about 800 tenant-based vouchers, which holders can use at any apartment or housing complex that accepts the vouchers, said Dagmar McKinney, housing agent for MSHDA. Most of those 800 vouchers, however, are currently in use.

McKinney wasn't able to say how many vouchers are available for applicants currently, but getting one is a slow process for most people. Five years ago, MSHDA officials took in about 1,600 applications from Kalamazoo County residents and didn't exhaust the names on that waiting list until last month.

"You are looking five or six years down the road for a name to get to the top of the list," she said.

Names of people put on the waiting list Wednesday will be placed in a lottery and a computer will randomly select candidates for the vouchers when they become available. If a candidate selected is income-eligible -- those who make more than the federal poverty level are denied -- he or she will be called, McKinney said.

Many people miss their chances at vouchers because MSHDA officials can't find them to notify them when they are being considered, McKinney said.

"In three years, we will have a lot of people who haven't updated their address," she said. "They have moved and we won't be able to locate them."

Holders of housing-choice vouchers must pay up to 40 percent of their adjusted gross income, though deductions are possible for prescriptions, child care and other necessities, said Peggy Pertner, a resource specialist at MSHDA.

The federal government will then cover much of what remains to meet rent payments, though there is a cap based on the fair market value for a rental unit in a given community, Pertner said.

MSHDA officials hope to have all of Wednesday's applications processed within 60 days and ready to be placed in the computer system to be drawn when vouchers become available, McKinney said.

Desperate demand for housing help

Kalamazoo Gazette

Thursday, May 18, 2006

It has been five years since local housing officials last accepted applications for Section 8 housing vouchers for low-income families.

It has been five years because that's how long it has taken to clear up the backlog of 1,600 applications for the federal housing assistance program.

So when it was announced that new applications for Section 8 vouchers would be accepted for one day only -- on Wednesday -- the floodgates opened. It is estimated more than 2,000 people applied for vouchers.

Four sites where the applications were being accepted -- Kalamazoo Community Mental Health offices, Rickman House, the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission and Kalamazoo County Department of Human Services training center -- suddenly had long lines of people trailing for a block or more, hoping to receive federal housing assistance -- or at least get on a waiting list.

Section 8 housing vouchers have been an effective way to help low-income people find decent housing without segregating them in crime-ridden public housing projects.

Those whose incomes are less than half of a community's median family income are eligible to apply. The vouchers allow tenants to pay rent that is capped at one-third of the tenant's income. The federal government pays the difference.

But the Section 8 program, under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, has had a rocky time over the last several years. Voucher funding was cut back and inefficient distribution formulas left some housing agencies with unused vouchers and others, like Kalamazoo, with long waiting lists. Approximately 100,000 families have lost their voucher assistance since 2004, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Next year, HUD expects to renew the more than 2 million vouchers that are funded this year at a cost of \$15.9 billion. That means there probably won't be any extra vouchers available for those who stood in long lines Wednesday.

By and large, a voucher becomes available when a family with a voucher starts earning too much money to be eligible or when a voucher tenant misses rent payments and is evicted or leaves the program for some other reason. There are about 800 such vouchers in Kalamazoo County.

Most of the people on the most recent 1,600-family waiting list didn't get vouchers. They were removed from the list when their names came to the top and housing officials couldn't locate them, according to David Anderson, chairman of the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission.

And so it will be a long, long wait for most of the people who stood in line. But it will be an even longer wait for anyone who failed to apply.

Anderson said he expects they won't be taking more Section 8 applications for at least another five years.

Thursday, May 18, 2006

Examiner: Unger was moved into lake Oakland Co. official says being in water while unconscious, not head injury from 12-foot fall, was fatal.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

BEULAH, Mich. -- Oakland County Medical Examiner Ljubisa Dragovic testified Wednesday that a Huntington Woods woman could have eventually died from her head injury if it had gone untreated but instead died because someone moved her body into a northern Michigan lake.

Mark Unger, 45, of Huntington Woods is on trial for the Oct. 25, 2003, slaying of his wife, Florence, 37, who was found floating face-down in Lower Herring Lake.

Investigators believe the woman was pushed or fell off a 12-foot boathouse deck at the Inn of Watervale resort during an argument with her husband about their pending divorce.

In more than two hours of testimony Wednesday, Dragovic told jurors how Florence Unger might have eventually died if her major head injury had gone untreated.

But instead her injuries and subsequent death were all consistent with someone who was put into the lake, where she drowned. Her body was found floating face-down in 5 inches of water.

"Something interrupted the brain reaction to that (head) injury," said Dragovic. "The fact she was found in water ... the fastest mechanism to create water-logged lungs and death.

"If you are unconscious and placed in water, you drown," said Dragovic. "You inhale; you don't hold your breath. You die. It only takes about a half-minute or a minute."

Dragovic said he excluded all other explanations for Unger's death before coming to his conclusion. He said there was a "lack of evidence" of inner cranial pressure or herniation of the brain, which eventually could have been fatal.

He stressed how the 5-foot-7, 140-pound woman was in otherwise good health. But Dragovic noted her lungs were three times their normal weight and contained fluids, including blood.

Dragovic ruled out other injuries and drugs as having caused her death.

"There is no reason for a conscious person to drown," he said. "But a person who is unconscious is capable of drowning in a bowl of soup."

Earlier in the afternoon, Judge Batzer appeared close to finding a defense attorney in contempt of court. Batzer and defense co-counsel Thomas McGuire argued about how a New Mexico district judge had once rejected Dragovic as an expert pathologist.

McGuire felt that information and situation should be discussed in front of the jury.

Batzer disagreed and told him that case and finding could not be placed into evidence or questioned.

That prompted a heated exchange Wednesday in court between Batzer and McGuire, out of sight and hearing of the jury.

Dragovic, by his own count, has done "thousands of autopsies" in more than two decades of work in medical examiner offices in Wayne and Oakland counties, and has testified in hundreds of court cases.

His testimony, including defense cross-examination, is expected to continue Thursday.

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